

The Promise of Tomorrow

by MaddHatta21

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Summary: Being barely ten himself, Okita Souji had charged in catching the man by surprise and inevitably freeing me from his grasp. He was armed only with a wooden sword at the time, but he held himself proudly, as if it were a real one.

1. Prologue

I first met him as a child. I had been wandering, lost, through the streets of Edo. I had gotten separated from my mother in the market, and being nine at the time had been sure I could find her myself. Unfortunately I hadn't considered that I had no sense of direction what-so-ever, and as it grew dark I began to regret my decision.

Shadows flickered past me in the darkening Edo alley-way, and a drunkard, collapsed near the back door of a Geisha house caught my wrist as I stumbled passed.

I can't remember the words the man said, I can only remember the fear I had of him, the tightness of his bruising grip, and the odor of his rancid breath.

What I do remember, is the boy who saved me. Being barely ten himself, Okita Souji had charged in catching the man by surprise and inevitably freeing me from his grasp.

He was armed only with a wooden sword at the time, but he held himself proudly, as if it were a real one. It was there, in that run-down alley, that I first caught a glimpse of that sardonic smirk.

"Didn't your mother tell you?" He teased the stunned man, "It isn't nice to pick on girls."

By then the drunkard was back on his feet, and furious, he charged at

Okita-san and I closed my eyes, predicting the outcome of the battle.

But when I'd opened them again, it was Okita who grinned down at me, "Pretty girls shouldn't be wandering around in this part of town," his eyes flickered with amusement, "if you do it again I might have to kill you."

That was the start of a beautiful friendship.

2. Chapter 1: The Boy With The Wooden Sword

It had been a few days since the alley-way incident, and after much research I'd found the dojo that was 'home' to my newfound friend.

The owner of the dojo was a kind and gentle man, called Kondou. He seemed to have only two students at the time, and he wasn't much older than I was at the time. He couldn't be much older than 15.

Kondou-san had informed me that the boy I described, Okita, had only recently joined his dojo and that he could likely be found in the courtyard.

When I found him he was leaning casually against a post, twirling a bamboo-copter in his fingers as he gazed up at the sky.

"O-Okita-san?"

I felt awfully out-of-place here. I wasn't sure how he would react to my presence, or if he even remembered saving me.

Still, I had come with a thank you gift that I had made all on my own. I hoped he liked onigiri.

"Why are you here," He didn't even look at me, "girls don't belong in dojos either."

His words were a bit off-putting, and for a moment I felt like I should leave. Still, I had yet to thank him for his actions in the alley-way, and it would be rude, now, to leave without answering his question. "I-I wanted t-to thank you," I stammered, "For saving me the other day."

He looked over at me, that wolfish smirk of his playing across his face, "You gonna kiss me? Is that it?"

I felt my face heat up, and waved my hands in front of me in embarrassment, "N-No nothing like that! I-I j-just came to give you these!"

I pulled the bento box out and held it out to him.

His grin widened as his eyes slid back to the sky, "Good, Cause if you kiss me, I might have to kill you."

* * *

><p>For the next few weeks I became a regular at Kondou-san's dojo. I came by when ever I could, using up all my free-time at my mother's shop to visit my new found friends.<p>

"Dammit Souji! How come you always win?"

"Neh~ It's because you eat too much Heisuke-kun." Okita's tone was light and teasing.

I peeked around the corner, shyly.

"Ah! Mogami-san! How long have you been standing there?" It was Heisuke who spotted me first, worried that I might have seen his loss.

"N-Not longâ€| " I murmured.

Okita approached us grinning, "Neh~ Heisuke-kun she's lying, she watched the whole match," Green eyes fixed onto me, "Girls aren't supposed to lie Mogami-san, if you keep it up I might have to kill you."

I fidgeted nervously under his gaze before Heisuke caught my hand and pulled me along after him, "C'mon Mogami-san! I want to show you something!"

I looked back at Okita-san, just by chance, and for an instant I was sure I'd seen the ghost of a frown.

Heisuke had found a young sakura tree near the back of the compound, it hadn't started to bloom yet, which was odd since it was sakura season.

"What's wrong with it Heisuke-kun?"

He shrugged, frowning slightly, "I dunno, I was kind of hoping you could tell me."

I giggled at his sheepish words, and Heisuke grinned, "Hey what's so funny? Don't girls usually know about this sort of stuff?"

I grinned, "Well maybe it just needs someone to talk to."

Heisuke looked at me oddly, "Why would it need that? Trees can't talk."

I shrugged, "I had a flower once that grew really well because I talked to it everyday."

Heisuke's grin came back full force, "You don't sayâ€| "

"When it blooms it will probably be the most beautiful Sakura tree around," I said with a little more confidence than usual.

As I started home, Kondou-san stopped me, "It's getting dark outside Mogami-chan, maybe I should walk you home."

I shook my head, "I'll be alright Kondou-san ," I beamed up at him, "I've walked home in the dark before." I left out that all those

times before I'd been with my mother.

Kondou hesitated, "Are you sure? Edo's pretty dangerous at night."

I nodded, "If I hurry I can make it home before it gets too dark, so don't worry okay Kondou-san?"

* * *

><p>I didn't make it home before dark, in fact I didn't make it home at all.<p>

Some ronin had found me in the street and recognized me as the daughter of one of their former companions. They insisted that I pay them what my father owed them, but my father had already paid off his debt to them. I tried to explain this to them.

I felt tears welling up in my eyes as one of the men slammed his fist into my face, "Don't feed us that crap! Just because your pa died don't mean you get off without paying us what you owe! If you don't have the money then you'll have to work for us!"

My head ached, and I was terrified, "My father paid you in full! You can't do this! You can't make me steal!"

I knew better of course, these men were giants to me, they could probably snap my neck without any effort at all.

This time the punch sent me crashing into some wooden crates.

The next morning found me huddled up behind some crates in the market, sobbing. I didn't want to steal from people, but it seemed I didn't have much of a choice. The thugs, who insisted they were samurai, had promised me that in two days time both myself and my mother would be dead, unless I paid them in full.

I hadn't gone home, mother would have cried if she'd seen me like this. I couldn't bear to go back to her, not until my bruises healed. She would blame herself, when really it had been all my fault for wondering off on my own.

"What did I tell you about pretty girls and dark alleys?"

I jumped, startled at the familiar voice, refusing to look up at Okita. I didn't want him to see me cry, I didn't want him to see how stupid I'd been to go out on my own.

"Are you gonna kill me then?" I asked, sniffing.

He seemed surprised by my question, but I could feel that grin of his a moment later, "Only if you don't stop crying."

I scrubbed at my eyes, glancing up at him from the shadows.

He sat down awkwardly, "So just what's wrong with you anyway? You can tell me you know?"

I shook my head, "I-It's nothing," I murmured, "I-I fell down is all."

There was something odd about his grin and his tone of voice, an undercurrent of some sort, "Neh~ Mogami-chan you're lying again. Besides, that doesn't explain the bruises on your face and arms."

My gaze snapped to him, how had he seen my injuries through the dark?

"You want to explain those to me Mogami-chan?" His voice was still light, and playful.

I shook my head, "It won't make any difference."

Still some seconds later I found myself telling Okita what had happened.

He'd left soon afterwards, voice still cheerful, "Stay here alright Mogami-chan? If I come back and you aren't here I might have to kill you."

Something about his words had made me laugh.

* * *

><p>When Okita returned several hours later, I had begun to dose off.<p>

My eyes shot open the moment a small sack of money landed on the ground at my feet.

I looked up at a grinning Okita, "That's how much you owe them right?"

I opened my mouth to protest.

He still had on that roguish grin of his, "And don't say anything stupid like 'I can't take this' or I might end up killing you."

I walked to the shady old shack the ronin called headquarters, with the money in hand, but somehow I knew no matter how much was in the sack, it wouldn't be enough. Okita trailed along behind me, seemingly unbothered by all the shifting shadows and strange noises that surrounded us.

I felt a little bit more confident with Okita at my back and I entered the headquarters with my chin held just a tiny bit higher.

"Hey you little rat! You better not be here without our money!" Before I even had time to react one of the ronin had reached out to catch me by the collar of my kimono.

"Hey, hey, it isn't nice to pick on girls you know. If you're not careful I might have to kill you."

Okita's green eyes seemed to glow eerily in the night, but the ronin weren't afraid.

"You're just a kid! Don't you realize who you're dealing with? We're the Hayakawa! What can a runt like you do to us?" They all had a good laugh about it.

I tried to free myself while they were distracted, but the man tightened his grip on me, and slung me towards the wall. "So you thought you'd try and fight us is that it you little bitch?"

I braced myself for the impact of the wall, only to find it much less painful than I'd imagined, I looked up to see Okita grinning at the man.

"I told you to be careful didn't I?" his words sounded menacing, though the tone of his voice hadn't changed. His grin was almost terrifying.

It was over before I could blink, two of the men had lunged for him, and now lay unconscious on the ground, another bigger man had a frightened look on his face, "D-Demon!" he cried, before fleeing the scene.

"That's no fun," Okita half whined, before his gaze flickered to me, "You alright Mogami-san?"

All I could do was nod.

3. Chapter 2: The Winds of Change

As months flew by things began to change.

I'd grown taller, celebrated a birthday. Mother began to talk about finding me a suitable husband and letting me take over the shop.

She wanted to send me to a school for young ladies, but the more she talked about it the more I began to dislike the idea.

All I was really interested in was watching Heisuke talk to a sakura tree and trying to get Okita's homemade bamboo-copters to fly. Okita was much better at it than me and I was determined to figure out why that was.

On this particular day I'd been watching Okita spar with Kondou-san. I'd been watching them all for some time now, wondering what it might be like to fight like they did.

I waited until Kondou-san wasn't looking, and took one of the boken from the weapons stand. I only wanted to see if I could pull off any of the moves.

The courtyard was empty, so I figured it might be the best place to try things out. I must have been out there for an hour before I heard someone clapping.

Kondou-san was watching me from the porch, Okita not far behind him watching me with that mocking grin.

"Mogami-chan! You're really good! Your master must be proud."

I blushed, bowing deeply, "I'm sorry Kondou-san I only wanted to see if I could do some of the moves, so I borrowed your boken without asking."

Kondou seemed surprised, "Do you mean you haven't had any lessons in swordsmanship?"

I looked up at him, confused, "Mother says that ladies don't play with swords, but I like to watch Okita-san and Heisuke-san when you teach them."

This seemed to surprise him even more, "So you learned all of that by simply watching?"

I felt my brows furrow, was that unusual?

"Y-Yes sir."

* * *

><p>Before long I was sparring with Okita-san and Heisuke-san, and learning from Kondou-san.<p>

Kondou-san had given me a boken of my own, but I knew mother would disapprove of my learning swordsmanship, and so I usually left it at the dojo.

Of course Souji often insisted that 'Girls weren't supposed to fight with swords.'

He walked me home, passing the time with death threats and wry humor.

I found myself wishing I could spend more time in the dojo with Souji.

That, of course, is when things took a turn for the worst. Mother insisted that I go to the school for young ladies. She couldn't support me for much longer and she insisted that the school would teach me to take care of myself.

I didn't want to go. The school was far away, if I went I wouldn't get to see Souji and Heisuke.

Still mother insisted, and on the day she packed up my things and prepared to make the long trip I snuck out the back door.

Mother didn't understand, I didn't want to be a lady, I wanted to be a samurai. I didn't want to spend years of my life trapped inside dormitories with a hundred other girls. I wanted to spend my time twirling bamboo-copters and teasing Heisuke.

I ran as fast as my feet would carry me, straight to Kondou-san's dojo. As I rounded a corner I ran straight into Okita and his stupid grin.

He steadied me, "You should slow down Mogami-chan. If you bump into Hijikata-san he might kill you."

I didn't bother to ask who Hijikata was, all my worries came out in a rush, "Mother wants to send me off to some stupid school for ladies, but I don't want to go! So I ran here! Please let me stay with you until she changes her mind!"

He seemed surprised, but slipped right back into that grin of his, "What's so bad about this ladie's school any how? You're a girl aren't you? Isn't that normal?"

He seemed to be teasing me, and I frowned at him, plopping down at the edge of the porch to swing my legs back and forth. "Maybe I don't want to BE normal."

Souji sat down beside me, leaning against a support beam, I moved my gaze to the courtyard and the colorful leaves coating the ground.

"If I go to that school they'll make me wear make-up and pretend I'm a doll. They'll force me to behave in a lady-like manner and I'll never be able to pick up a sword again. Mother will marry me off to some rich old man and I'll never be free again."

Souji was staring up at the sky when I looked over at him, "What's so bad about all of that?"

He seemed to be completely serious, as if he couldn't understand why that bothered me so much.

"That isn't the kind of life I want. It isn't living if someone else is dictating which decisions I should make," I frowned, staring down at my swinging feet, "I want to choose my own path in life, and make my own decisions."

It was quiet for a moment before Souji spoke up, "If that's the case then just don't go."

I felt my eyes widen, as his words sank in. Why hadn't it occurred to me? It seemed so obvious now, if I didn't want to go then no one could FORCE me to go.

Souji got up, "Neh~ Mogami-chan if you don't close your mouth you'll suck in a fly."

I looked up, snapping out of my stunned thoughts, looking up into Souji's deep-green eyes. He was smiling again, that stupid teasing grin.

I returned his smile with one of my own, and leapt up to follow him.

* * *

><p>After spending the night in Okita's room at the dojo without Kondou's knowledge, I decided it was safe to go home.<p>

By the time I got there, there was nothing left.

Mother's shop had burned down completely, terrified I began to search the crowd for my mother. I called out her name, and got no reply.

"I heard there was a woman inside."

"Yeah it must have been a horrible way to go."

"Didn't she have a kid too?"

"I heard that the Hayakawa were upset because they owed them money."

"She should have known better than to get involved with a gang like that."

The voices of the crowd began to blend together, as my eyes focused on the one thing I didn't want to see. Doctor Matsumoto was examining some human remains, even from a distance I could tell who it was.

The only thing I could recognize was the silver locket my father had given her for her birthday before he'd died.

I felt myself crumpling to the ground.

I should have stayed home.

4. Chapter 3: The Roshigumi

After that, Kondou took me in, but I began to lose weight.

I didn't eat much, and I was much quieter than usual. I stayed busy, and practiced hard, my soul purpose in life, to avenge my mother.

If the rumors hadn't been enough, then the Hayakawa's bragging in the local taverns was more than enough proof of their heartless actions.

Hijikata Toshizo, whom I soon learned was Kondou's latest resident, had often watched me with some strange form of concern. At night I could hear him and Kondou-san planning to build an army to protect the shogunate. Sometimes if I listened closely enough I might hear them mention their concerns about me. I would always roll over and pretend like I hadn't heard.

* * *

><p>When spring came I decided to face the Hayakawa, I'd kept good tabs on them during my stay with Kondou-san, and with Kondou-san's plans to close down the dojo and move to Kyoto it seemed like now was the only chance I would get.<p>

I went alone to the Hayakawa headquarters, sword in hand, and felt no remorse when my blade sliced cleanly through my first real opponent.

It was as if I'd been possessed by a demon, and I defeated them all, running on fury and pure adrenaline.

It wasn't until the deed was done that I came to my senses, I found myself covered in blood, in the center of a room full of corpses.

The weight of my actions came crashing down on me. I'd just killed a man, more than one, and I hadn't hesitated. What good did it do me to kill them? It hadn't brought back the lives they had stolen, it hadn't eased my suffering, it had only made it worse.

When the dawn finally came, it was Souji who found me there, covered in blood, eyes fixed on my hands.

It was Souji who snuck me home in a blanket, and cleaned the blood off my trembling hands.

It was Souji who kept my secret.

It was Souji who shared my burden.

* * *

><p>Summer came quickly, and the move from Edo to Kyoto had everyone excited.<p>

Kondou-san had asked us all to join the Roshigumi and, after a little teasing and a long terrifying lecture from Okita's sister Mitsu, we all agreed to join.

It wasn't long after we'd settled in to our new home that we met Nagakura Sanosuke and Shinpachi Harada.

Heisuke and Okita seemed to get along with them right away, but it took me a little longer to warm up to them.

Not long after Sano and Shin joined the Roshigumi, we found two new members, Hajime Saito and Keisuke Sanan. It seemed the larger our little family got, the more like a family it felt.

In an odd way it felt as if I had gone from having no family at all to having an extremely large one.

Kondou-san became my father figure, while Shin, Sano, Saito and Toshi became my older brothers. Heisuke became like a younger sibling to me. The only person I couldn't quite place was Souji.

* * *

><p>"The Aizu said no? I can't believe it! I thought for sure they would hire us or at least give us the chance to prove ourselves!" Heisuke was not happy .<p>

"I say we tag along anyway, who knows they might even fall under attack and then we can show them up," Sano's plan sounded fun.

"Yes I'm sure they'll hire us after we make them look like fools in front of the shogun ate."

I grinned, "Saito has a point, but I still like Sano's idea."

"We could just kill them all and then the shogun ate would have to hire us in the place of the Aizu," Souji grinned wolfishly.

I shoved him playfully, "You just want to kill people."

He responded in a singsong voice, "Careful Mogami-san or you might be next on my list."

I scowled, "You always say things like that."

He gave me a sardonic grin, "You always do things that make me want to kill you."

I rolled my eyes, running my fingers through my short messy hair. I'd cut it short not long after the Hayakawa incident. It had been a symbol of leaving my old life in Edo behind.

That once, shy , nervous girl who's biggest concern had been trying to avoid going to a girls school was gone. She had been replaced with Mogami, Karou, member of the Roshigumi and protector of the people.

Still the Hayakawa incident weighed heavily on my mind, despite my efforts to forget it entirely.

I couldn't have known then that the happy family I had come to love would soon be faced with a similar burden.

The Roshigumi, a group of masterless samurai who's hearts were aligned under a single purpose. How could we have guessed what would befall us?

5. Chapter 4: Saved by a Bamboocopter!

Chapter 4: Bamboo-copters

"Wow! It flies really far Okita-sama!"

I leaned up against the wall, watching the children run around Souji, trying to make their bamboo-copters fly as far as his.

I saw Heisuke making his way towards us just as Okita responded to the children.

"Not only does it fly far it always comes back to me see? Watch."

The bamboo-copter spun through the air and straight for Heisuke's head, "S-Souji!" Heisuke tried to escape it only to find that the children had released all of theirs as well.

After a moment, Souji' bamboo-copter spun back, landing neatly at his feet, and Heisuke was sitting on the ground surrounded by bamboo-copters.

We all laughed.

Shortly afterwards all the children returned home. Heisuke joined Souji and I on the porch.

"I'm bored~" Souji half-whined.

"I know but you really need to find something better to do than make bamboo-copters," Heisuke said, scowling at the pile of wooden toys.

"This is all because of Kiyokawa Hachirou," Okita laughed.

Heisuke's scowl only grew, "That damn traitor! The moment we arrived in Kyoto he moved back to Edo to work for Sonno-Joui."

We had moved here to protect Kyoto, and our numbers had greatly increased since our move. There were 234 of us now. Kiyokawa, had been the real reason we'd moved to Kyoto. It had been Toshi and Kondou's idea to join the Roshigumi under Kiyokawa's leadership, but the moment we'd arrived in Kyoto we received word that Kiyokawa had fled to Edo. We later learned that he had switched sides, instead of protecting the shogun ate as a Roshigumi he had turned against it and started working for Sonno-Joui to overthrow it.

"Forming the Roshigumi to protect the shogun was a total lie! All he wanted was a bunch of warriors that he could use for his own purposes!"

Heisuke's anger was understood, we had been mis-led.

"You know," Souji began with a quiet smile, "I was really happy when I joined the Roshigumi."

Heisuke seemed surprised, and I was only slightly confused.

"Kondou-sensei and Toshi-san said 'Your sword can save people and this country'," Okita was carving another bamboo-copter as he spoke and I felt a smile slide across my face again. I understood now, the Roshigumi had given us both a feeling of belonging to something important.

"I've never been wanted like this," Okita finished.

Silence fell between the three of us, until I spoke up.

"What are we going to do now?" My voice came out as barely a whisper, "We can't make a living if we don't have a job."

Heisuke deflated, falling back onto the porch with his hands behind his head, "She's right, all our contacts are back in Edo."

Souji grinned, "Don't worry, we'll figure something out," He handed Heisuke the finished bamboo-copter, an unspoken challenge that we were all familiar with.

I watched as the copters spun through the air.

"Dammit!" Heisuke scowled as his copter touched down a ways behind Okita's.

"I won again," Souji teased.

"Let's go find something to eat," Okita called back to us.

Heisuke picked up his bamboo-copter and stared at it for a moment, while I walked casually passed him to catch up with Okita.

"Something wrong Heisuke?" I called back.

His head snapped up, a grin on his face, "Nope, nothing at all!"

* * *

><p>"I'm telling you we're from the Roshigumi!" Sanosuke's voice rang out across the city streets.<p>

"Don't bullshit us! Judging by your outfits and faces it's easy to see that your from that obnoxious Toubaku group!"

"Didn't your parents teach you not to judge people by their appearance?"

I moved towards the group of villagers gathering around the argument.

"You can't be Roshigumi because they're supposed to leave for Edo soon! Why are you in the city anyway?"

Sanosuke twitched, "We came to buy food."

"Nonsense!"

Shinpachi shouted, "Why did you ask if you weren't going to believe us?"

Sano shoved Shinpachi out of the way, "Obviously talking isn't gonna get our problem solved."

In an instant Sanosuke had snatched an old man's walking stick and was twirling it around like a maniac.

I took a few rapid steps backward, finding myself shoulder to shoulder with an equally disturbed Souji and Heisuke. "He's at it again."

"Take a good look at the might of Taneda Hozoin!"

Shinpachi, let out a bark of laughter, sliding into a stance and reaching for his sword, "And Shindou Munen school. Prepare yourse-" Shinpachi's speech was cut short when Sanosuke's 'staff' collided with his head.

"Shinpachi? I hit you?"

I smacked my own forehead, covering my mouth to contain my laughter.

"Quick! Arrest them!"

"Hey! Wait a minute!"

I blinked, looking to my left and right, to find Souji and Heisuke gone. "Huh?"

Sanosuke waved, "Hey guys what's up?"

"You can't be trusted because you strip all the time," Okita cried, and it was true enough, I hadn't seen Harada Sanosuke in a fight yet, wear he hadn't been naked from the waist up.

"What? Not you too Souji?"

I began to laugh, hysterically, until I heard the police shouting again, "You two are with them?"

Uh-oh! The police were closing in on my friends. I moved into a position where I could easily create an opening in the ranks if need be.

"Stop!"

Everyone froze, all eyes moving to a really large man.

"Let those boys go."

Judging by the guy's body guards I'd guessed that he must be someone of import.

"I am Takano Seinoshin. Kyoto's East Machi-Bugyo assistant. I'm assuming you're from Aizu-han working for Kyoto Shugo-shoku."

So that's who he was, a magistrate administrator, that meant he was hired by the shogun to protect the peace in Kyoto. He was with the shogun ate!

The police were not so easily persuaded, "If you're a Kyoto Machibugyo assistant then you should understand our situation here. Why would you side with these lawless roshi?" (A roshi is a samurai without a master.)

The fat man smiled, "I can see in their eyes that they are not lawless at all."

We all watched curiously as the man made his way to Souji, "Besides, it's you isn't it? The one who makes these?" He pulled out a bamboo-copter, surprising us all.

"Some children gave this to me when I was walking through Mibu. I think it would make a good present for my son."

Souji seemed to be even more surprised than the rest of us, "Yeah, I make them a lot when I'm bored!"

The man chuckled, "Well then, it's a good thing, my son was crying earlier maybe this will cheer him up. What's your name?"

"Okita Souji, I'm staying with the Roshigumi here in Kyoto. You can check with the roshi administrator Udonou Kyouou-sama."

"Well then Okita Souji, it looks like I can count on you. The Roshigumi are here to protect the shogun aren't they?"

Okita nodded, bowing politely to the magistrate, "Thank you very much!"

Sano leaned over to one of the policemen, a confident grin on his face, "See? I told you I wasn't lying."

"This is delicious!" Shipachi cried, as he snatched some inazari off my tray.

I scrambled to get it back, "Hey you bastard! Don't go stealing food off my tray!"

Sanasuke did a funny impression of the magistrate, puffing up his face "I can see it in their eyes!"

Shinpachi slapped him on the back, both of them laughing loudly.

I spoke with my mouth full, "You guys sure you should be laughing at the guy? He did save your asses."

"I think he should have let them get captured," Heisuke scowled, snatching his tray out of range of Shinpachi's wandering chopsticks.

I laughed, eyes sliding over to Okita who was sitting to my left smiling to himself.

"Recently, activities of the Tobaku are becoming too obvious. They keep assassinating people and calling it 'divine punishment'," Heisuke growled, "people dispatched from Aizu are getting edgy."

I shrugged, "The Aizu don't want our help, so if we do anything about it then we can't really tell anybody."

"Yeah but if we can get the Aizu to back us up then we might make some money," Sanosuke put in.

"Hiring us would reduce their workload too," Shinpachi added.

"They already said no once, I guess we could ask again, if we ask enough times maybe they'll cave and hire us on," I grumbled.

Okita leapt to his feet, excitedly, grabbing onto Heisuke's collar, "Let's go talk to Kondou-sensei! He can come up with some ideas to win them over!"

I grinned at his enthusiasm, laughing lightly as he dragged Heisuke out with him, "Do you think he'll remember that Kondou-san went back to Edo to sell his dojo property?"

Sanosuke shrugged, "Who knows?"

He snatched another bite off my tray, causing me to catch him by the collar, "Hey bastard! Get your own food!"

He laughed, "But Mogami-san! I'm a warrior I need more food to keep up my strength!"

I got him in a playful headlock, "Eat Heisuke's food you mongrel!"

* * *

><p>Two days later we received news of another 'Divine Punishment'. Takano Seinoshin, the man who had come to our rescue days before, had been assassinated.<p>

Heisuke and Okita had been the ones to find the decapitated body of the magistrate, we all felt as if we had failed somehow.

I think that it affected Okita more than the rest of us, even with that strange smile of his, I could still see an angry determination in his eyes.

The assassination of Takano Seinoshin, was a burden on us all, and it proved that Kyoto needed us.

Kondou returned soon afterwards, with news that the Aizu had contacted him, it seemed they wanted to hire us after all.

Shortly afterwards we all left the Roshigumi to join the Shinsengumi, a new volunteer police force that was assigned to protect Kyoto and the Shogun.

We were given new headquarters, and ordered to make rounds in Kyoto through out the day. It was a duty with fulfilled with pride.

* * *

><p>I waved to Shinpachi, as our routes intersected, "See anything weird today Shin?"<p>

He grinned, "I don't suppose your face counts does it?"

I swatted at him, "No it doesn't."

He scratched his head, "In that case I guess not," Teasing blue eyes landed on me, "What about you Mogami-chan? See anything scary on your rounds?"

"Just you."

Shinpachi laughed.

* * *

><p>Winter was coming in fast, I realized as a cool wind blew across the compound.<p>

The uneasy feeling I had gotten when I'd received news of the magistrate's assassination was growing by the day.

I hadn't been sleeping well, it was as if some unseen force was trying to point something out. Something we'd missed? Or Something that had yet to happen? I wasn't sure.

I sighed, lifting my gaze to the night sky. As if the stars would hold some answer for me.

"You don't look so hot Mogami-san. Are you coming down with a cold?"

My gaze shifted over to Okita as he sat down beside me, "No, I justâ€| haven't been sleeping well."

His grin never faded, "Are you worried about me?"

I felt my cheeks heat up throwing my hands up in a flustered denial, "N-No it's not that I just-"

His smile vanished, and the look he gave me made me instantly regret my words. He seemed genuinely saddened by my denial, "um, wellâ€¦ Actually," I shifted my gaze nervously to the courtyard, "I'm sort of worried you might over-react if we find those Tobaku guys." I fidgeted, "I don't want you to get hurt is all."

When I looked up he was grinning slyly and I realized I'd fallen right into his trap. "Karou-chan I didn't know you cared."

I made a lunge for him, totally embarrassed, "Souji you jerk! That was a really mean trick!"

He laughed latching onto both my wrists as I attempted to strangle him, and laughing all the while.

Then the laughter stopped, Souji was still smirking up at me and the only sound I could hear was my heartbeat as it pounded against my chest. Before I even realized what was happening Souji had leaned up and pressed his lips to mine.

The kiss was over as suddenly as it had started, and Souji pulled away, still grinning like a madman and still grasping both my wrists.

He looked at me teasingly, "That was easier than I thought. You had me believing you were a respectable girl Mogami-chan."

I resumed trying to strangle him, "I was respectable until I met you, you creep!"

* * *

><p>The next morning the compound was a flurry of excited movement. The Aizu had assigned us to guard a man named Katamori. We were to escort him to Niijo Castle, and put down any uprisings along the way. The job seemed easy enough.<p>

Kondou assigned Okita, myself and Saito to the job and we each took two men from each of our divisions.

Since joining the Shinsengumi Okita, Saito, Heisuke, Sano and Shin had all worked our way up to Captain status. The only real perk to the job was that we now had about thirty men each who had to listen to our every order. Toshi, of course had been selected as the vice captain of the captains, which pretty much meant we had to follow his orders. The only orders Toshi had to follow came directly from the Aizu or from Kondou-san, whom we had selected as our leader.

Sanan had been recently promoted to captain of the research division, a job that fit him well.

"The Aizu aren't sending any back up on this mission, so you'd better not fuck up."

I rolled my eyes at Toshi's announcement.

"Has anyone seen Sano and Shin?" Heisuke asked suddenly.

I shrugged, "Not since yesterdayâ€¦"

Toshizo Hijikata made a face, "They're probably in the red light district knowing those two. They've been playing around over there every since we moved here."

Okita hadn't said a word, Toshi turned to him, "Okita, the men you fought after the Seinoshin assassination, were they strong?"

My head snapped up, Okita had gotten into a fight? With whom?

"Yes."

Hijikata nodded, "Then they will probably attack Katamori directly, no matter how heavily guarded he is, we need to be prepared for that."

* * *

><p>I waited until Hijikata and Heisuke left the room to speak up, "What the hell Souji? When did you get into a fight?"<p>

He didn't look at me, as if the subject was one he would like to avoid.

"You should stay here."

The words cut through me like a knife, "W-what?"

He didn't respond, and it pissed me off, "Why? Because I'm a girl? Is that it Souji? I can't handle a couple Tobaku bastards? Is that what you think?"

He remained dis-interested, further fueling my temper, I jerked him up by the collar.

"Answer me!"

He jerked out of my grasp, "You shouldn't have come here," his words were barely a whisper, but they knocked the breath right out of me, "Go back to Edo where you belong."

He stormed out the door, leaving me standing there, stunned for a moment. I stormed after him, "Hey you bastard! You don't run my life! I joined the Shinsengumi because I wanted to and I'm going to Niijo Castle even if I have to kick your ass to get there!"

Souji didn't turn around, and all my shouting did was draw unwanted attention from the corps.

I scowled at a group of passing soldiers who had stopped to see what the commotion was about, "What the hell are you looking at? Get back to work!"

I stormed off in the opposite direction as Souji, hoping to take out my fury on one of the boys in a healthy sparring match.

Sano and Shin, were still no where to be found, but I found Saito on the training grounds.

He was simply watching the leaves that fluttered by.

Saito didn't even bother to look in my direction, he had this uncanny ability to know when someone was nearby as well as who that person was.

"You shouldn't allow his words to anger you."

I didn't respond, because I didn't know whether I should be angry with Saito or not. One could never tell exactly which side he was on from the way he spoke.

"I'm sure he is only concerned for your well being."

I scoffed, "Yeah well, Souji, of all people should know that I can handle myself by now."

It was hard to stay angry at Souji, I found myself replaying the Hayakawa incident in my mind.

"Perhaps you should tell him so."

Maybe Saito was right, but it wouldn't be today. It would feel too much like apologizing, and that wasn't something I was up to doing.

A large hand landed on my shoulder, surprising me.

"H-Hey! Mogami-chan! Did anyone ever tell you how adorable you look when you're mad?"

I visibly twitched at Shinpachi's drunken comment, and pulled away from him causing him to fall forwards and land face first on the porch.

I put my foot between his shoulder blades twisting my foot into his back, "Don't call me adorable! It sounds creepy when you're drunk!"

Sanosuke, clutched his stomach, laughing at his friend's misfortune, "How many does that make 12?"

"Ah! Shaddup Sano, I bet you couldn't pick up a girl if you tried."

I couldn't help but smile at their constant bickering, as I left to prepare for the trip to Niijo.

7. Chapter 6: Attack on Katamori

****My mood was far from good as my men and I took up the duty of guarding the right flank of Katamori's carriage.

I could see Niijo castle up ahead in the distance, it didn't seem like we would make it there by nightfall. I could hear the fifty or so Aizu soldiers complaining already about how tired they were, my

fellow Shinsengumi kept quiet. We were here to prove ourselves by out doing the Aizu soldiers and protecting Katamori in the event of an attack. It was an unspoken rule amongst the Shinsengumi troops, that none of us would show any signs of fatigue or weakness. Until Katamori was safe inside Nijo Castle.

* * *

><p>I sensed, more than saw the three men approaching our quiet little camp.<p>

I remained still, eyes scanning for any sign of movement in the surrounding trees.

"There are two of them," Saito said, barely audible as he appeared beside me hand on the hilt of his blade.

I narrowed my eyes, "Why only two? There are at least sixty men in our camp. It doesn't make sense."

Saito nodded curtly at my whispered query, his eyes focused on something in the shadows, "Souji is guarding the carriage."

I nodded, catching his drift, I signaled to my men to hold their positions near the carriage while Saito and I dealt with the intruders.

In the event that Saito and I got caught in some sort of trap, Souji would still have enough back up to protect Katamori.

We crept forward, at first together, and then drifted apart as we neared the shadowy forest of trees.

My hand was steady on the hilt of my sword, and my feet were swift as I moved silently through the trees.

The battle started without warning, my enemy, no doubt a Tobaku by the looks of him, stood nearly three times as tall as myself.

His size might have been daunting, if it hadn't been for his aura. The man radiated a sadistic glee and reeked of blood. He had somehow managed to creep up behind me, quite a feat for a man his size, if not for his stench I might well have died in that moment.

I caught his blade with my own, the echo of steel on steel reverberating through the trees.

He threw his weight forward, pushing me back, searching for a weak spot in my defense. I planted my feet, holding my own for just long enough for the bastard to push harder.

In one swift movement I allowed his blade to slide down my own and crouched down bringing my leg around in a sweep, that not only sent my opponent to the ground, but also spiraled me out of harms way.

I raised my sword, ready to strike the downed man. This was war after all, and my opponent was still armed.

I brought my sword down with both hands and felt warm blood splatter across my face.

For a moment I stood frozen, suspended in time by some unknown twist of fate, and then I was crumpling to the ground, shock evident in my features, and Saito was standing over me.

He glanced at me over his shoulder, "Can you move?"

I took in a ragged breath, swallowing to clear the desert that my throat had become so that I might speak, but the pain of just that breath stole and strength I had left to speak.

Still, I nodded, gritting my teeth against the agonizing hole in my chest, I pulled myself into a sitting position, just as Saito launched into a battle of his own.

I planted my sword into the ground and used it to heave myself up. The ensuing wave of dizziness and agonizing pain that followed nearly drove me to my knees, only my pride as a swordsman, and as a member of the Shinsengumi kept me standing. I would not fall so easily.

My opponent, it seemed, was now locked in battle with Saito, while Saito's opponent, and apparently my attacker was struggling to his feet a few yards away.

He shot forward, rage burning in his eyes, and I felt Saito's back collide gently with mine as I blocked my new opponent's sword.

This man was no less dangerous than the last, he was definitely smaller, but his strength was undeniable. He leapt back, skidding to a halt three feet away before launching himself at me again.

I blinked, trying to clear the spots from my vision as I blocked his attack with an arrogant smirk, "You Tobaku bastards sure are confident. Or maybe you're just stupid, attacking a sixty man armed force without any back up."

Saito and I separated, both pushing forward at the same moment to counter attack.

The man caught my blade with his own, and I tried to focus on something besides the violent protest of my wound.

"Two is all we need to kill Katamori."

I shook my head, still appearing nonchalant, "Maybe, but you've got to get past us first."

His smile was an eerie one, "You're injured, you won't last much longer."

Our swords clashed again, and I realized I was panting and that my body was trembling. It was getting harder to focus on his movements and my reactions were slowing.

I grinned, wiping some of the blood off my face with the sleeve of my uniform as I skidded to a stop a few feet from him, "Yeah but judging by your movements, you're not much better off than I am."

He launched at me once more, swinging his sword with practiced fury, I barely managed to block in time and stumbled a bit as I regained my

stance.

"Do not put me in the same category as you."

I made a face, "Yeah I don't really like that idea much either, you're too ugly to be lumped into my category."

He laughed, a crazed psychotic laugh that put me on edge despite my nonchalant façade, and attacked once again.

I felt my sword swipe through skin as I pitched forward and collided with the cool ground.

* * *

><p> Sorry it's so short guys but I'll have the next chapter soon!
>Special thanks to Arcee-chan and madluv for reviewing!

8. Chapter 7: Snow in Kyoto

"Calm down Souji she's injured not dead."

"You shouldn't have allowed her to come in the first place!"

"She joined the Shinsengumi of her own free will, she knew what she was signing up for when she agreed to accompany us."

"Don't give me that shit Hijikata! She's hurt because of you!"

The sound of a slamming paper door reverberated throughout the room, and I winced as I pushed myself up into a sitting position. I didn't look up, allowing my bangs to fall into my face.

"I-I'm sorry Hijikata-san," I croaked.

The vice-captain sighed, kneeling by my side with a cup of water, "Drink this," he ordered. I obliged, choking on the water as it went down the wrong pipe.

The coughing fit left me feeling fatigued.

He sat down, running a hand through his long hair, "You should rest. You aren't any use to us if you can't make the trip back in the morning."

I stared for a long time at the wooden cup in my hand, Okita was really upset, he blamed Hijikata for my condition and that thought filled me with a deep sadness.

Maybe if I hadn't gone in the first place-no, if I had stayed behind then Saito would have been on his own.

My eyes widened as my head snapped up to look at vice-captain Hijikata. "Saito-san is he-"

Hijikata held up a hand, "He's fine. I sent him back to headquarters to inform Kondou that we will be returning tomorrow."

I relaxed; glad to hear that Saito was alright. Hijikata got to his feet, "Sleep. You'll have to walk back with the rest of us."

My hand went to the dully aching wound in my chest, after a few minutes I reached for my sword.

I struggled for a few minutes to get to my feet, my breath coming in pants visible in the chilled night air. I pulled my hakama on over my kimono and then carefully pulled on my sky blue haori on over that.

It wouldn't have been a good idea to go outside without the extra warmth provided by my uniform, I slipped my katana into my cloth belt.

Slowly, I moved towards the shoji door trying to ignore the twinges of protest made by my aching chest.

Nijo castle's corp quarters were bustling with activity as the Shinsengumi chattered loudly and enjoyed their food.

The excitement made it easy for me to slip out of the building.

* * *

><p>It was snowing outside and I took a moment to absorb the site of the snow covered city as I caught my breath.<p>

Up ahead I could see a flash of light blue, I moved towards it through the diminishing crowds of Kyoto.

I lost sight of the haori as a citizen brushed past me, knocking me into another citizen, and my heart sank.

I worked my way through the crowd, breathing heavily; I wiped the sweat from my face with my sleeve and caught a glimpse of Okita's back much further away than before.

I reached out, as if I could grasp his haori from where I stood, panting, "S-Souji!" I called.

The call became a series of coughs that caused me to whimper in pain as they jostled my injury. I let myself sink to my knees so that I could catch my breath.

"Why are you here?"

Something fell across my shoulders, drawing my attention up to the familiar face of Souji.

The snow fell gently around him, and small flakes of snow found themselves caught in his bangs causing him to glitter and glow in the moonlight. Despite the angry look on his face I felt my face flush.

"If you don't give me an answer I might have to kill you."

His voice brought my attention back to the situation at hand, "I-I came to find you."

My statement seemed to surprise him, if only for a moment, and then he was back to his usual self.

"So you followed me into the snow in your condition? That's not very smart Mogami-chan," he teased, "and someone might take it the wrong way."

I looked away from him, feeling more tired than before, "I-I wanted t-to apologize," glancing up once more I met his eyes, "You shouldn't be angry at Hijikata-san anymore okay? I'm the one who wanted to go. I let my guard down, and it caused problems for everyone else," I clenched my fists in my lap closing my eyes as I half shouted, "so please Okita-san, if you're going to be angry, be angry at me."

I kept my eyes shut, waiting for Souji to tell me to go back to Edo where I couldn't be a nuisance anymore.

To my surprise he sighed, "You're not very smart are you Mogami-chan?"

I felt the weight of his hand on top of my head and felt childish as I opened my eyes to look up at him, "If you keep sitting there you're going to get sick."

* * *

><p>Special thanks to Mina Luriya and skycord1990 for their encouraging reviews! Sorry it took so long!

9. Bonus Chapter75:In Sickness & In Soup

****Chapter 7.5: Sickness and Soup****

****This is a bonus chapter and it may or may not factor into later chapters.****

* * *

><p>The walk back to headquarters was worse than I'd imagined, my feet were nearly as heavy as my eyelids and the thick snow along the road didn't help matters.<p>

Still, I kept my head up, at least attempting to look like the soldier I was, besides, if I looked like I was slacking then the people of Kyoto might assume that all Shinsengumi were slackers.

"Mogami-san!"

I glanced over to Shinpachi, who was marching to my left and whispering rather conspiratorially, "Want me to carry you?"

I raised an eyebrow at the impish grin he was sending my way and knew he was up to something, "Che. No way womanizer," I muttered.

Shinpachi's quiet pouting whine on any other day would probably have made me smile, but as it was- "ACHOOO!"- I wasn't feeling so well.

I caught a glimpse of Toshi up ahead and sighed, he was giving me that weird worried mother hen look again.

"Seriously," I grumbled before sneezing again, "You'd think the demon of the Shinsengumi would be a little moreâ€¦| demonic."

Sanosuke caught up to me on the right, "He won't admit it, but Toshi was actually really worried about you. He even asked if we could stay a few more days at Nijo castle until you were better."

Naturally the nobles had refused that request. I glanced away from Sano, not sure exactly how I should feel about that, "He shouldn't have done that," I said wearily, "now it'll be my fault if the Aizu never send for us again."

"Aw You're looking at it the wrong way Mogami-chan!" Shinpachi threw an arm across my shoulders, causing me to wince as it slightly jostled my already agitated wound, "Working for Aizu wouldn't be much fun without your cute face around."

I shoved his arm off my shoulders, trying not to appear like I was struggling just to stay on my feet, "Are you sure he didn't have any sake before we left Nijo?"

Sanosuke laughed at my question, "Who knows?"

I glared at them both suspiciously before sneezing again.

~*~

>The second we got home Toshi ordered me to get some sleep.<p>

"You're being a mother hen again," I told him with a pout.

"Shut up, and go to sleep or I'll cut your pay for ignoring my orders last night."

So he knew about that huh? I sighed, giving in to the vice-commander. It's not like I had much energy left to argue with him anyway.

"Mogami-san! Are you alright? You must be tired walking all the way here!"

I sneezed again as Kondou bounded over to us, and waved him off "I'm fine I'm fine, I'll be back on my feet and doing my rounds first thing in the morning."

"Like hell, Heisuke's taking your rounds tomorrow; you aren't going anywhere until you can take two steps without sneezing."

I diverted my pouty look over to Kondou-san, who laughed slightly, "You never change do you Toshi," Kondou met my eyes with his own kind ones, "You should listen to Toshi on this one Karou. I would hate to send you out on patrol in your condition. You should rest."

With one last look at the pair of them I trekked back to my room.

~*~

>When I next opened my eyes, I found myself staring into an abyss of emerald green.<p>

"Neh~ Karou-chan! You're finally awake!"

Souji was wearing that teasing grin of his again, I blinked, "Soujiâ€|"

"hmmmm?"

"Uhâ€| why are you so close to my face?"

The grin widened, "Karou-chan is sooooo adorable when she sleeps!"

Souji pinched my cheek, making me feel like a child again, I swatted at him, and instantly regretted the action as pain shot across my chest.

"Karou-chan, You should be more careful."

I half-scowled at Souji as I pushed myself into a sitting position, "Was there something you needed Souji-san?" I asked softly.

"Kondou-san asked me to bring you something to eat. You haven't eaten since yesterday right?"

I wasn't feeling particularly hungry, but since not eating would bring both Kondou and Hijikata down on me I decided it would just be simpler if I ate.

Only, as I pulled the tray over so that I could reach it, I sneezed. The sneeze was so violent that it not only sent me reeling backwards and into my bedding, but it sent the bowl of miso and its tray toppling over and into Souji's lap.

"That wasn't very nice Karou-chan," Souji sounded serious but there was a catch in his tone that only the people closest to him could pick up on. I knew he was teasing me, though I couldn't see his face.

I lay there for a few minutes, waiting for the pain in my chest to fade as I stared at the ceiling and Okita cleaned up the mess I'd made.

Without really realizing what I was doing, I found myself watching him.

Souji spoke with a light tone, no doubt teasing me again. Whatever he said was lost on me as my eyes began to slowly slide shut again.

10. Chapter 8: The Calm Before The Storm

Spring found me standing peacefully in the courtyard, watching as the sakura petals danced on the wind.

It seemed like just yesterday that Heisuke and I had spent hours taking care of a dying cherry blossom tree in Edo.

We were older now, and a lot had changed since then.

A bamboo-copter flying on the gentle spring breeze brought a smile to my face.

There were some things that would never change.

I yelped as a strong arm dragged me down into a playful headlock, "What are you so quiet for Karou! Did your brain fall out on the ground somewhere?"

I laughed, trying to pull free of Shinpachi's hold, "No I was thinking of ways to help you find yours!"

He ruffled my hair with a noogie, "Hey now! That's just mean!"

I flailed, only to find myself laughing when Sanosuke whacked his friend over the head with the blunt end of his spear.

"You suck at dealing with women Shin."

Heisuke joined in with a laugh of his own.

"Heh! I'll show you; you little runt!"

I stepped out of the way as Shinpachi started chasing after Heisuke.

"Heisuke you should respect your elders!" Sano added, joining in on the chase.

My gaze moved to the porch where Kondou-san was laughing heartily as he sipped on some steaming tea. Souji was carving himself another bamboo-copter. Hijikata was leaned against a post, watching the scene with mild amusement.

And for the first time in a long time I realized, I was happy.

* * *

><p>"So then we hear this guy across the room talking about how the Shinsengumi are nothing but trash, and Hijikata-san slams his cup on the table!" Shipachi shouted animatedly.<p>

"Yeah and then He stands up and stomps over to the guy and just slams his foot into the guy's face!" Heisuke continued.

"The table flipped over and knocked out the man's companion," Sanosuke put in.

"And then Toshi says 'Old man, this should pay for the damage' and hands the owner some money and the guy yells 'Please never come back!'" Shinpachi finished, causing us all to laugh.

Well, everyone except Hijikata, who seemed mildly irked by the whole ordeal, "If people are going to complain about how we do things then they should get off their asses and change things."

"I would have just killed them and got it over with," Souji said lazily.

"Violence doesn't solve everything you know Souji?" I responded, as I finished the last of my rice.

The room seemed to go silent at my comment, and for a moment I didn't notice, but then I felt everyone's eyes on me and looked up.

"What? It's true!" I said in my defense, setting my bowl down.

"I agree with Mogami-san," everyone turned to look at Saito, "Some situations are best handled with a demonstration of superior intellect."

It remained silent for a moment and then Heisuke spoke up, "Yeah but violence is definitely more fun!"

Sano and Shin raised their sake cups in approval, cheering boisterously.

I rolled my eyes, laughing at their antics as I moved on to my steamed fish.

As the meal continued I could feel Souji's eyes on me, I fidgeted under his scrutiny, trying my best to keep from glancing in his direction.

After a while Souji got up and left.

The meal continued as if he were still there.

* * *

><p>Later that night I found Souji sitting on the stairs in the courtyard, staring up at the stars like he did every so often.<p>

I moved to sit beside him.

"Neh~ Karou-chan."

My gaze shifted to Okita, "Yeah?"

He kept his eyes on the sky, leaning back as he spoke, "What's a pretty girl like you doing in a place like this?"

I got the feeling that he wasn't teasing me, at least not completely, and that he really wanted to know.

I let my gaze slide back to the sky as I answered him, "At first, it felt like I had no place else to go, and I thought 'If I have to live somewhere then I would rather it be near Okita-san and Heisuke-kun'," I paused for a moment, thinking, "but then Kondou-san taught me how to fight, and I met Saito and Sano and Shin and they became the brother's I never had. After that Hijikata taught me what being a samurai really means and for the first time in a long time I felt like I belonged somewhere; like I was a part of something important."

I glanced over at Souji, who seemed just as relaxed as ever, "I guess I'm here because leaving isn't something I can do. Staying here, with Kondou-san and everybody, it means the world to me."

'Being near Okita-san means the world to me' I added mentally.

Souji frowned, still not looking in my direction and then, just as quickly as it had vanished, his playful grin returned, "Hmmm~ Karou-chan isn't being completely honest."

I felt my face flush as Okita's emerald green eyes flicked over to meet mine.

"I think the real reason is because Mogami-chan has fallen in love with a very handsome samurai," Before I knew it Souji had moved closer, leaning over me and trapping me between his lean arms, "Isn't that right Karou-chan?"

"N-No way! N-Nothing like that!" I protested, feeling flustered all the sudden; I put a hand on his chest and gently pushed him back.

"I-I should g-get some sleep," I laughed nervously.

Okita chuckled, allowing me to escape as he returned to his previous position.

I moved to leave, heart pounding in my chest.

"Karou,"

I stopped, looking back at the preoccupied Souji with a fluttering feeling in my gut.

"Good night."

I found myself smiling, "Good night Souji-san."

11. Chapter 9: A Glimpse of Hell

**Neh. I feel like this one is lacking... but here's an update for you guys! Thanks for reading by the way! Also I hope I can fit a few more updates into the holidays! But I guess we'll have to wait and see. ;)**

**-Vongola Thirteen**

* * *

><p>Dead. They were all dead.

Kondou, Toshi; the men who raised me, lay dead before me in a pool of blood.

_Heisuke, always trailing along behind me, or dragging me off to see some girly thing he'd found, dead. _

_Shin and Sano always smiling and goofing around, silent and still, no longer smiling. _

_Saitou, careful, quiet, Saitou, always there to answer my questions, ease my concerns; he would no longer do that. _

_And Souji; No matter how much I wanted to close my eyes against this harsh reality, I could not, because those forest green eyes were boring into me. It was almost as if they were asking 'why?'. _

_I reached out a trembling hand, to caress his face, to wipe the blood from his mouth. It was as if my entire world shattered all over again, those glazed green eyes, tearing me to shreds. I let out a mournful wail, moving to pull him into my arms. _

Souji, strong, defiant, playful Souji. My Souji...

_Laughter echoed all around me, as I rocked back and forth, grasping tightly to Souji. Even in death I could not let him go. _

My gaze was ripped away against my will, and I found myself staring into the darkness.

Red eyes, red eyes and white hair.

* * *

><p>I woke with a jolt, the dream slipping away like the morning mist, despite my attempts to grasp onto it.<p>

It seemed like some sort of warning, a threat that left me feeling on edge and uneasy.

I got up and dressed, grasping onto my katana as I slipped out into the courtyard. It was still dark, too early for even Saitou (the earliest riser) to be awake.

I slashed my sword through the air, trying to ease that awful sense of foreboding that had lodged itself in my chest.

I must have been out there for hours before I heard a voice.

"You seem on edge."

I jumped ever so slightly, and turned to face Toshi, sheathing my sword.

I bowed respectfully, "I'm sorry if I woke you."

I blinked owlshly as a hand landed on my head, and looked up at him curiously.

It wasn't often that Toshi smiled, but I could have sworn I had seen him doing just that. It was gone in a flash, replaced with that stern look of his.

"You should be sleeping."

Hijikata removed his hand and I straightened, not quite sure how to respond to that.

After a moment I had decided, "I slept, and awoke feeling uneasy. I

thought perhaps some exercise would calm my nerves."

Toshi sighed, "If you fall asleep during your rounds I'll dock your pay."

I couldn't stop the grin that spread across my face as the demon of the Shinsengumi took his leave. I somehow felt a bit more at ease.

* * *

><p>All seemed well in the streets of Kyoto, aside from the usual snide comments about 'the dogs of Mibu'.<p>

I ignored them, petty insults were not illegal and so it would have been pointless to react to them.

That's what they wanted anyway right? For one of us to attack and prove that the Shinsengumi were incapable of properly arresting criminals. Still, we were far more capable than those so called 'patriots' who spent their days drinking and squandering money in the red light district.

"Hey Mogami-chan you shouldn't think so much, you might knock something loose up there!"

I felt a grin slide across my face as Shinpachi's overly large hand landed on top of my head.

"Even if that were true I would still be better off than you Shinpachi," I gave him a devilish smirk as I signaled my squad to stop, "anything on your end?"

Shinpachi laughed, "Caught a couple of ruffians outside Ichiban's Tea House. What about you?"

I shrugged, "Nothing so far. Maybe we should ask Kondo to switch our routes."

Shinpachi clapped me on the back "Feeling left out?"

I rolled my eyes, "It's been awhile since I've gotten to play is all."

Shinpachi laughed as we both got back to our jobs.

* * *

><p>Night had fallen in the Shinsengumi headquarters but no one was asleep.<p>

"What do you think they're talking about?" Heisuke half whispered.

I shrugged "Who knows?"

Kondou and Toshi had both been called into a meeting. A meeting which none of us captains were allowed to attend. If that wasn't enough to raise our curiosity, then the fact that it was a meeting with shogunate officials was more than enough to have us all asking questions.

"The whole thing sounds fishy to me," Shinpachi said seriously.

I nodded in agreement.

"Toshi and Kondou can handle it. Whatever it is!" Sano added.

"We should leave this in their hands," Saitou agreed.

It was at that moment that a loud agonized scream sounded throughout the compound.

We were on our feet in an instant, and rushing towards the sound.

"What the hell is going on?!" Heisuke asked as we ran.

"Something serious by the sound of it," Shinpachi replied.

I grasped my sword more tightly, "whatever it is it can't be good."

We reached the door to the inner compound only to find that it was barred shut.

Heisuke struggled to push it open, while the rest of us started looking for some way to break it down.

"What happened to him?!"

The shout from the other side made my blood run cold.

"Toshi! Sannan-san! Don't let him escape!"

Shinpachi stiffened beside me, "Hurry it up Heisuke!"

"It's stuck!" Heisuke snapped back.

I caught a glimpse of an old statue nearby, "Okita!"

His gaze followed mine and the two of us moved towards it, "Great thinking Mogami-san!" Sanosuke called out as he moved to help us.

Together the three of us slammed the statue into the door, dropping it the instant the way was clear, and charging in ready for battle.

I could hear Saitou giving out orders as we ran, but none of them seemed to be directed at me so I continued on, keeping pace with Saitou and Souji as we darted towards the source of the commotion.

The compound's meeting quarters.

The three of us barged in, swords at the ready.

Something came bounding around the corner towards us, making guttural growling noises.

I froze.

There, at the end of the hallway was a man, running on all fours, sword between his teeth. His glowing red eyes pierced through the darkness, through a stringy veil of white hair.

It charged towards us, like a feral dog, eager for blood.

"Humans don't move like that," Souji's voice was loud in my ears, though he hadn't spoken loudly at all, he slipped into a fighting stance and I snapped out of my fear long enough to prepare myself as well.

Saitou had vanished from my line of sight, but I assumed he was still nearby, waiting in case we needed the element of surprise.

Souji's sword slammed through the creature's abdomen, a blow that would have killed any normal human.

Something told me, this man, this creature was not human at all.

"Look out Souji!" Shinpachi's warning call was all that I needed, I shot forward just as the creature reared back to retaliate.

The beast's sword came slashing down on us and I blocked it with my own, giving Souji enough time to dislodge his own sword as Saitou slashed through the creature from above.

"What the hell is this thing?!" I cried out as the creature somehow remained standing.

I caught a brief glimpse of an eerie smile as the creature slammed its foot into my chest, sending me slamming into Souji.

The wall behind us collapsed as Souji and I slammed into it.

Saitou ran passed us, chasing after the thing.

"If you wanted to lie on top of me all you had to do was ask."

I felt my face flush as I realized the position I was in, I scrambled to my feet.

After a moment Souji pulled himself up as well, both of us on the move again.

We exited the building, shooting around the corner at break neck speed when we heard Sanosuke call out to Shinpachi.

"Be careful Sano!" Saitou came around the opposite side of the building at the same time Okita and I caught a glimpse of what was going on, "That thing isn't human!" Souji warned.

Shinpachi pulled himself out of the remnants of a wall that he had obviously been thrown through while Sanosuke slipped between the creature and our fallen comrade, spear at the ready.

The monster charged.

There was the familiar clang of battle as Sanosuke's spear ricocheted

off of the beast's blade, piercing the creature's upper arm, and then Sanosuke was lifted off the ground, still latching onto his weapon.

"W-what the hell?" Souji was right, there was nothing human about this creature.

I darted forward, hoping to aid Sano, Souji grasped my collar and pulled me backwards, just as the creature flung Sano across the compound grounds and straight into Shinpachi.

It tore the spear from its arm, throwing the weapon aside as if were nothing more than a nuisance and we watched in horror as the creature's wound healed itself.

The beast turned toward the shattered door, obviously intending to make its way towards the other men in the compound. If that thing could throw us around like children's playthings, I didn't want to see what it could do to the low ranks.

All the six of us prepared to fight it all at once, as it shot forward, straight into Toshi's blade.

I stopped, staring as the creature's blood splattered all around Hijikata-san.

"Hijikata-san! Get away from it! That thing is-"

Toshi tore his sword from the creature's body, addressing not only Sanosuke, but the rest of us as well.

"It's alright. You can kill it by beheading it or piercing its heart."

It was no longer moving, whatever _It _was.

Shinpachi and I exchanged stunned glances as the creature hit the ground.

My heart pounded in my chest, I opened my mouth to ask what the hell 'it' was doing in our compound, but a familiar voice interrupted me.

"Is anyone injured?"

We all turned to look at Kondou-san.

Souji stepped forward; brushing passed me as he went
"Kondou-san!"

"Souji, are you hurt?"

"What the heck was that thing?" Shinpachi grunted as he pulled himself back to his feet.

I moved over to further examine the creature, as Toshi put away his sword.

"I've seen that face before," Sanosuke said allowed, as he followed me over.

"Me too," I murmured.

"Saitou, Harada, I need you to carry him inside," Hijikata-san spoke as if he hadn't just been in a life or death struggle with some non-human creature.

I shifted my gaze away from the body, which now seemed perfectly human, as Sanosuke and Saitou moved to follow their given orders.

"Everyone please gather in the meeting hall. We need to talk."

12. Chapter 10: Between Duty and Desire

**I feel the need to mention that the plot will not be precisely on par with the animes or the games. There will be minute changes that may or may not be noticeable through-out the story so if you notice them please do not judge the entire story on those minute differences, as most of them are not key elements in the plot line to begin with. Anyway, here's another quick update before I go to bed. ;) two in one night! I guess I'm on a roll!
-VongolaThirteen**

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* * *

><p>The wait in the meeting hall was even more restless and eerily silent than usual.<p>

All of us were on edge, gazes shifting from here to there and bodies tense as if we were all expecting more of those creatures to attack us while we waited.

Several of us jumped when the shoji door slid open with a loud 'clack'.

Hijikata-san seemed more irritated than usual as he and Kondou-san led a couple of unfamiliar faces into the room.

To our surprise it wasn't Hijikata-san that explained to us what was going on, but an elderly man by the name of Yukimura, Kodo.

It seemed that the shogunate had discovered a serum which, once administered, could give a soldier in-human strength and agility as well as abnormal healing abilities. Unfortunately the taking the serum came with a high price; those who took it lost all sense of humanity and became crazed bloodthirsty beasts.

The creature, or rather the man that had taken the serum, seemed familiar because he was one of the few men in our ranks that had followed us to Kyoto from Edo. His name was Isato, and I remembered him to have been a very soft spoken and kind-hearted man; but it seemed he had broken some of the rules that Toshi had posted, and he had supposedly been scheduled to commit sekkapu the next day for his transgressions. They had used the serum on him instead.

"It's the same principal. He was going to die either way," one of the

officials who hadn't bothered to introduce himself spoke to us snidely.

I felt my irritation rise, "It's not the same thing!" I snapped, "There is a difference in dying and being experimented on! What the hell were you people thi-

"Mogami! Sit down!"

Toshi's outburst startled me, and after a moment I bit my tongue and sat back down, still fuming over the whole ordeal.

The man spoke again, as if rubbing my reprimand in my face, "He didn't get to die using seppakku, that is the only difference."

I ground my teeth, barely able to resist the urge to show him the difference myself, when Toshi spoke again.

"I am against experimenting with this serum. Isato did not recognize any of us after taking it."

Kondo backed him up, "I feel the same way."

"But there is still room for improvement!" The official insisted.

"And to test it out you would need to use more men!" Toshi argued, sounding more irritated than before.

"This is an order! The shogunate has ordered that you obey!"

"There is no need to obey an unreasonable order."

"Orders from the shogunate are virtuous! Even if they seem unreasonable," the man snickered for a moment, "But I suppose I shouldn't expect someone like you to understand that! Virtue isn't taught to non-warrior scum like yourself."

"What was that?!"

Toshi looked as if he was about to throw himself at the man across the room and show him just how wrong he was, but Kondou-san, who up until this point had remained silent, spoke up.

"Toshi."

Hijikata-san seemed to rethink his actions, he sat back down, giving me a stern look, though by the looks of it I hadn't been the only one who had been prepared to jump to his defense.

"Given our current position we have no other choice but to follow the shogunate's orders."

Everyone's heads whipped in Keisuke, Sanan's direction.

He continued, "However, if there is still room for improvement, I feel it would be wise for Niimi-san to give up his position and remain here to research the serum to prevent another incident from occurring."

The official had been nodding in agreement, until it occurred to him what had been said, "You can't be serious!"

This time it was his commander that spoke up, "Very well."

After a moment, Hijikata-san stood up, "you're all dismissed for the night, don't say a word about what you've heard here. Got it?"

* * *

><p>I couldn't sleep, I hadn't known Isato very well, and perhaps he had broken the laws of the Shinsengumi, but no one deserved to suffer such a gruesome death.<p>

I stared at the ceiling, trying to make out various shapes in the darkness.

"Mogami-chan?"

I lifted my head at the sound of Souji's voice, "You can come in."

I got up from my futon and moved to light a lantern as Souji slid open the shoji door.

Once it was lit I set it in the center of the room and sat down across from him.

He rubbed the back of his head, "You couldn't sleep?"

I shook my head, "Not at all."

He gave me one of his sardonic smirks, "Worried I'll kill you in your sleep?"

I felt my lips slide into a familiar grin, my mood lightening ever so slightly, "I haven't heard that one in awhile."

We sat in silence for a few minutes, and I found myself watching the flickering light of the lantern between us.

Souji's voice was extremely serious when he spoke up again.

"Karou,"

I immediately looked up, he rarely used my first name; usually only when he was in a really good mood, or most often when I had done something to upset him.

Forest green eyes, bored into my wide brown ones, the flickering lantern light only making him appear more dangerous.

"If you ever get between me and an enemy again, I will cut you down."

My heart skipped a beat. Was he serious?!

I wasn't sure, he seemed perfectly serious, his tone sounded menacing, but something was nagging at the back of my mind. Why was

he saying this now?

"You helped me beforeâ€¦ I was returning the favor," I watched him, trying to gauge his reaction.

Something flared up in his eyes, and my instinct screamed at me to keep my mouth shut or risk him following through with all of his previous promises to end my life.

The tension was gone in an instant as Souji stood up and brushed himself off, "You were in the way, do it again and I'll kill you."

I felt my own anger rise to the surface again and shot to my feet, shouting at his back, "Do you think you can tell me what to do Souji?! Do you think you can intimidate me into doing what you want?! I'm not afraid of you! If I risk my life that's because it's my life to risk! You don't have any say over what I risk it for!"

His head snapped up, fierce gaze fixed on me, "Is that what you think?! It's your life so you choose when and where it ends?!"

He stormed towards me, and I held my ground, "Who do you think fought for that life of yours on countless occasions? Who is the person who took you in and taught you to fight? Who was it that made a place for you here of all places?"

I felt my ego deflating, Souji was right, if it weren't for him and Kondou and Toshi I would have died out on the streets of Edo.

"It isn't your life to risk Karou! So don't throw it away so easily!"

He slammed the shoji on the way out, knocking it out of its track so that it hung in its frame at an angle.

I stared after him, not sure if I should apologize or shout at him again.

After a few moments Heisuke's voice called out hesitantly from the outside of the door, "Mogami-san?"

I hesitated, not sure if I should cry or be angry.

I blew out the lantern and then moved to the shoji, fixing it as best I could before slipping out onto the porch where Heisuke stood, unsure of how he should approach the situation.

I gave him a half-hearted smile, "Did we wake you?"

He scratched the back of his head, as we moved to the edge of the porch to sit, "I was awake, I couldn't sleep afterâ€¦ you know."

I nodded, "Yeah."

13. Chapter 11: Apologizing to Stupid Trees

**I couldn't sleep with this floating around in my head... so here... I'm giving it to you guys early! :P lol **

****This has to be my favorite chapter by far! I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it... I figured it was about time one of these sword swinging lunatics made a move...****

****More chapters to come! Also what do you guys think about a sequel to this? I've been giving it a lot of thought... but I wanna hear what you guys think!****

****Vongola Thirteen****

*** * ***

><p>When I woke up the next morning Souji was nowhere to be found.<p>

I assumed he was still angry at me, despite the fact that I still did not fully comprehend what had made him angry to begin with. Hadn't our conversation started out pleasantly? Then why had it ended so viciously?

I pinched the bridge of my nose, trying to ease the ache in my head. "Ugh! Why does Souji have to be so complicated?"

It was a comment muttered under my breath, and more to myself than anyone else, seeing as I hadn't thought anyone was around to hear it.

"He's concerned."

I blinked, registering the slightly gruff voice of the demon commander. I tilted my head backwards to find Toshi standing over me with his arms folded comfortably across his chest.

I felt my face heat up in embarrassment, and quickly averted my gaze, "Sorry, Toshi-san. I didn't think anyone was listening."

After a moment he sat down beside me on the edge of the porch. He didn't say a word, just staring out across the empty courtyard.

"I guess you heard last night too huh?"

I was pretty sure the entire compound had heard us arguing.

Rather than reprimand me, which was what I had expected from Toshi, the demon commander merely grunted in affirmation.

I sighed, heavily, "What do you mean he's concerned?"

I thought I saw a brief flicker of a smile slide across Toshi's face, but it was gone before I could get a better look.

"You should ask him."

I twitched, "You can't be serious! Why can't you tell me?"

He got up again, this time with a full blown smirk on his face, "shouldn't you be training your squad?"

I balked as his face turned serious again, "Hey! You-" He was right, I was supposed to be training my men, I sputtered, pointing my finger

at him as he began to leave, "You're evil! The devil incarnate!" I called after him.

"If you don't get to work I'll dock your pay," he called back.

* * *

><p>The next few days went by without incident, though Souji still wasn't speaking to me.<p>

I wasn't entirely sure what I had done wrong, but even Shinpachi, who had always been the one to break heavy silences, kept his mouth shut.

Finally, after three days of eating, training, and patrolling in complete and utter silence, I couldn't take it anymore.

I slammed my chopsticks down on the table, refusing to look at anyone as I allowed my bangs to shadow my face.

"Hey. I'm sorry alright?" my words seemed to echo in the silence, even the sounds of clacking chopsticks had stopped around me, "Soâ€¦ So can we go back to normal now?"

I could feel Souji's eyes on me, for a few moments, but he didn't respond.

The longer I sat there waiting for a response, the more humiliated I began to feel.

After about two minutes of silent humiliation, I got up from the table, fists clenched at my sides, and stormed out the door.

Nothing but silence followed me out onto the training grounds, where I took out my frustration on the single tree in the center.

The punch did little more than increase my irritation in the form of bleeding bark shaped scrapes across my knuckles.

_Stupid Souji. He won't even tell me why he's mad! Why does it even bother me? _

"Picking fights with trees isn't very smart Mogami-chanâ€¦"

I froze, some part of me deep down was elated to hear his voice, but for the most part it only upset me more.

Was he here to humiliate me some more? To yell at me over things that made no sense? To chastise me for caring about my comrades? To insult me for caring about him?

I refused to look at him, "Why not? The tree doesn't care."

For a moment I thought he had left me there, "Let me see your hand."

It was an order, one that I hesitantly and reluctantly obeyed, because honestly, I really didn't want to fight with him again.

I still refused to look at him.

His hands were warm, I realized as he examined my self-inflicted injury.

"Just because the tree doesn't say anything, doesn't mean it doesn't care Mogami-san."

I let my gaze slide over to Souji, as he pulled a large piece of bark out on my bleeding knuckle, I immediately looked away, "Yeah well, the least the tree could do is accept my apology."

I could swear I heard him snicker, "I'm sure the tree would accept your apology if you told it what you were apologizing for."

I twitched, wondering how long we were going to compare him to a tree. I pulled my hand out of his grasp.

"I'm sorry for yelling at you and for not considering the feelings of others before putting myself in danger."

Souji chuckled, "I thought we were talking about the tree Mogami-chan."

I twitched, the bastard was teasing me!

"I'll show you tree you big jerk!" I growled, moving to give him a good bop over the head (something I hadn't done since we were children).

Souji laughed, catching my fist easily, before it could connect with the top of his head.

Now his eyes took on a devilish glint, and I involuntarily let out a surprised squeak as he moved forward.

He wasn't letting go if my fist!

I felt my back hit the tree, "I told you didn't I Karou? It isn't smart to pick fights with trees."

I started to let out a nervous yelp, only to freeze as something slammed against my lips.

A brief moment of heart-stopping panic ensued before I realized... Souji was kissing me.

It was by no means a soft or gentle thing. This kiss was violent, and full of something I couldn't exactly pin down.

I felt myself relax into Souji, fervently returning the kiss as my stomach filled with an unfamiliar burning sensation.

I had always wondered what it would be like to kiss Souji, but this completely overshoot all of my expectations.

I felt him smirk as he pulled away, wondering dazedly when he had pinned down my wrists, I panted as he released me and stepped back. That mischievous glint still glimmered in his eyes "Just as I thought, as un-respectable as ever."

I felt my eyes widen as his words dawned on me, "I was perfectly respectable until you came along you jerk!"

"If you hurt yourself again I'll kill you~" He called back in a sing song voice, giving me a backwards wave as he walked off and left me standing awkwardly beneath the sakura tree.

For some reason the only thought I could manage was "I should pick fights with trees more oftenâ€|"

* * *

><p>It's about time these two made up... but how will this step forward affect their relationship?!

**Find out next time... or you know... whenever I decide to update ^^' cause I'm lazy like that... **

I'd like to point out, to all those guys out there reading this... that this story will obviously have it's girly moments... but will mostly try and stay focused around the main plot... so don't be chased away by the few romantic-ish scenes kay?! ;) My inner fangirl demands them!... Now... I'm gonna go pick a fight with a tree...

End
file.